

The **ASPIRA**[®] Story



The **ASPIRA** Association, Inc., National Office

The ASPIRA Story

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for the ASPIRA Association, Inc.

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Introduction to Second Edition, 1994

Since *The ASPIRA Story* was published in 1991, the ASPIRA Association has continued to grow, expanding and deepening its services to new generations of Latino youth. In this reprinting of the document that marks ASPIRA's thirtieth anniversary, we are pleased to add a few, brief highlights of the years following its initial publication.

The **ASPIRA of Connecticut** affiliate office, just beginning in 1991, is now an energetic and growing member of the ASPIRA family. Its Executive Director, Vicente Siberón, reports that ASPIRA Clubs are active in Bridgeport, Hartford, and New Haven. The addition of fourteen new Americorps volunteer staff members will allow counseling and tutoring services to expand even more throughout 1995.

ASPIRA of Florida opened the ASPIRA Alternative Middle School, called ACCOLADE, in fall of 1991. It is fully accredited through the Dade County Public Schools, and in spring of 1994 graduated its first class of eighth graders to go through all three grades. ACCOLADE provides innovative and intensive education to 100 at-risk Latino and other minority students. Florida's educational programs place a special emphasis on mathematics and science enrichment, with its computerized community homework center, for example, featuring a hands-on science lab. The office exposes youth to new forms of communication through its own Aspirante-run cable television and radio shows. Florida has also expanded its services to some of the rural communities that were devastated by Hurricane Andrew in 1992. Its innovative programs in juvenile delinquency prevention and multicultural leadership have received national recognition.

ASPIRA of Illinois celebrated its 25th anniversary in 1994 with a gala concert and dance. The support they received from ASPIRA alumni and from city leaders, including Mayor Richard Daley, was tangible evidence of the depth of ASPIRA's presence in Chicago. One of the office's greatest triumphs occurred late in 1993, when ten parent participants of the ASPIRA Parents for Educational Excellence program campaigned for and won seats on Chicago's important local school committees. The parents had entered ASPIRA's program "initially shy and hesitant," according to the program coordinator. Their personal and political victories were a great source of pride. Illinois is also justifiably proud of its award-winning Family Math/Science Program, a partnership with Argonne National Laboratories, Loyola and Northwestern Universities. The program serves both high school and grade school students and parents through a combination of peer tutoring, family-centered science activities, and bilingual computer science enrichment.

ASPIRA of New Jersey's strong statewide work has continued through the terms of two Executive Directors. Fernando Fuentes filled the post during 1993-1994. In April of 1994, seven-year staff member Roberto Del Rios was chosen to succeed Fuentes as Executive Director. He now supervises four regional centers and over fifteen programs. Del Rios' vision for New Jersey includes bringing ASPIRA's services to younger children. He points to the Early Intervention Program, which targets middle school students in Camden and Newark with counseling and tutoring services, as an example of New Jersey's move in that direction. The office has also continued its strong tradition of statewide gatherings, with an annual Youth Conference, a Health Careers Conference, an Alumni and Supporters' Luncheon, and, in 1993, a conference entitled, "The Plight of Latino Males: Strategies for Action."

ASPIRA of New York went into 1992 with a new location and a new leader. They enhanced their work in all of New York City's boroughs by moving back to more centrally-located Manhattan. And they hired Lorraine Cortés-Vázquez, who had already shown her dedication to ASPIRA through her volunteer work on the Board of Directors, as the new Executive Director. With her management expertise, Cortés-Vázquez has worked to strengthen internal operations. Under her leadership, the office has embarked on several major initiatives.

In December of 1992 the office held an opening kick-off for the ASPIRA Alumni Association, which conducted its pilot project in New York, home to the largest number of alumni. The office's Project BEAM is turning a local school building into a community school, offering afternoon, evening, and weekend services to students, families, and other community residents. Their Project LEYES (Legal Education and Youth Empowerment Services) provides all assistance and enrichment needed to encourage young Latinos to enter legal careers, including a yearly mock trial scholarship competition and legal internships. Project ADEPT helps expose youth to the world of work and prepare them for meaningful careers. The AIDS Prevention Education Program trains Aspirante peer educators in the use of films and videos for AIDS education.

ASPIRA of Pennsylvania weathered a blow in the early 1990's that showed both the depth of its support in the community and the dedication of its staff. Its 17-year old Talent Search program, providing college counseling to hundreds of Aspirantes each year, was denied funding in 1991, but Pennsylvania refused to give up. The office sought and received support from a wide variety of state and community agencies and businesses to continue the program on a limited basis. The reduced staff doubled and tripled their caseloads, striving to provide the needed assistance to Philadelphia's Latino youth. In 1994 their persistence paid off, as Pennsylvania won back their Talent Search funding for another three years.

In addition to its college counseling, the office has established a reputation for high-quality vocational and career programs for at-risk and dropout youth. Its intensive Proyecto Alcance dropout prevention program earned an Outstanding Program Performance Award from the state in 1993. It has also expanded its

work with parents and with limited-English proficient adults, providing them with the skills and confidence to be active community members. Executive Director Emanuel Ortiz has continued his advocacy on behalf of Latino youth in the city, serving, for example, as one of two Latinos on the Mayor's Task Force for Children, Families, and Community; and participating in a 23-year old desegregation lawsuit against the Philadelphia School District, which was settled in favor of the minority litigants early in 1994.

ASPIRA of Puerto Rico has continued its strong emphasis on whole-family participation with two new programs since 1991. In 1993, it began participating in ASPIRA's national Teachers, Organizations, and Parents for Students (TOPS) program. In partnership with a local elementary school, it brings together parents and teacher-coaches in teams around individual at-risk middle school students. Puerto Rico's COMPAY Head Start Partnership, begun in fall of 1994, is a pilot expansion of the office's already-strong Head Start initiatives. The program uses the traditional concept of "compays" or "compadres" (godparents) to train families to help other families in their community who are identified as being at risk of substance abuse.

In addition to its family programs, Puerto Rico's Horticulture Project for Dropout Students has garnered much attention. High school dropouts earn their GED diploma while learning horticulture—a valuable job skill in tropical Puerto Rico—through hands-on work in ASPIRA's own nursery. As a side benefit, sales from the nursery provide income to both ASPIRA students and office.

The years since 1991 have brought changes to the **ASPIRA National Office** as well. Janice Petrovich, who guided ASPIRA to a new level of recognition and expansion, resigned as National Executive Director at the end of 1993 to join The Ford Foundation. Ronald Blackburn-Moreno, formerly with the College Board, was chosen as the new director.

From 1991 to 1995, four national programs began operation: the Alumni Association, the ASPIRA Math and Science Initiative (MAS), the Community Mobilization for Educational Excellence (COMEX) projects, and ASPIRA/Americorps.

The Alumni Association was launched to strengthen communication with the tens of thousands of Aspirantes in the country and tap their potential for service to their community. The campaign was piloted at the ASPIRA of New York office, ASPIRA's oldest program site, with hopes to expand its impact in the future.

The Mathematics and Science Initiative (MAS) works through after-school MAS Academies to bring together community partners—schools, parents, community mentors, and other institutions—to help middle school students learn the benefits and joys of math and science. MAS Academies operating in ASPIRA of Illinois and ASPIRA of Connecticut provide young Latinos with homework help, hands-on experiments, field trips to universities, museums, and laboratories, mentoring by Latino professionals, and family-centered math/science projects.

The Community Mobilization for Educational Excellence (COMEX) incorporates three separate community involvement projects: Teachers, Organizations, and Parents for Students (TOPS) Partnerships, Hispanic Opportunities through Parent Educational Support (High HOPES), and ASPIRA Parents for Educational Excellence (APEX). TOPS brings parents and teachers together around individual children to provide students with a supportive environment where all help the student to achieve academic and social goals. It operates in ASPIRA of Puerto Rico, Florida, and Illinois, as well as in six cities in Texas. High HOPES helps Latino parents plan for their children's college education through workshops, bilingual materials and the one-on-one assistance of trained counselors. It operates in ASPIRA of Illinois and New York. APEX trains parents to work collectively as advocates for improved schools. It trains parents in leadership development and education reform, working in ASPIRA of Illinois and Pennsylvania.

In the past few years, the ASPIRA National Office has extensively developed its federal advocacy arm. Throughout 1993, ASPIRA's National Executive Director chaired the nationwide coalition of the National Hispanic Leadership Agenda, which brings together Latinos from around the country to promote a unified policy agenda. In this capacity, Petrovich chaired a meeting of the Agenda in June, 1993 with President Clinton and Vice President Gore. Throughout 1994, ASPIRA co-chaired the Hispanic Education Coalition, an ad hoc group of the major national Latino organizations working on education policy. The Coalition worked closely with the Congressional Hispanic Caucus to develop and successfully promote Latino-supportive policies from preschool through college and job training programs. ASPIRA was recognized by President Clinton for its role in the revised and strengthened Executive Order on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans, signed by him in February, 1994.

Its contacts with federal officials continued to grow from one Administration to the next. For example, mentors for the ASPIRA Public Policy Leadership Program summer internship in 1994 included the Secretary of Transportation, the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, and four U.S. Representatives. Its staff are frequently consulted by Education and Health and Human Service Department officials. The National Office has also increased its efforts to keep the Hispanic community around the country informed of federal policies and successful alternatives. Its publications—ranging from the quarterly newsletter to regular fact sheets and issue briefs, press releases and articles, and monthly policy updates—bring ASPIRA's thirty-plus years of experience to a wider and wider audience.

Thus, ASPIRA moves through its fourth decade with its eyes on the future. As National Executive Director Blackburn-Moreno noted in ASPIRA's summer 1994 newsletter, "The time has come for a new mobilization to produce the fundamental changes needed so that every Latino child receives the education he or she is entitled to. [This mobilization] must include all the strategies we have learned to use through decades of struggle. If we recognize the power of what we know, of our organizational strengths, and are able to act to bring these together, I believe we will see fundamental change in the education of our children."

The ASPIRA® Story

Forward

1991 marks the 30th anniversary of the ASPIRA movement. Since its formation in 1961, ASPIRA has grown from a small nonprofit counseling agency in New York City to a national association with offices in five states, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia. While we celebrate the milestone of our thirtieth anniversary and reflect upon the exciting history of the ASPIRA movement, we also look ahead to a future of growth, expansion, and a renewed commitment to ASPIRA's mission: empowering the Latino community through the education and leadership development of its youth.

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The ASPIRA Story

The turbulent 1960s brought to life the ideas, dreams and goals of the ASPIRA movement, but the history of ASPIRA really begins much earlier. One could trace the roots of ASPIRA's mission to the first migrants making the long journey to the United States from Puerto Rico, coming to America to work, to continue their education, or to escape political and economic oppression. These migrants brought with them not only their dreams and ambitions, but also a strong identity with their cultural heritage. It is this sense of identity that has given strength to Puerto Rican communities, and has been the backbone of support for the ASPIRA movement through the years.

The Early History: Puerto Ricans in the United States

After Puerto Ricans were declared U.S. citizens in 1917, they began to migrate to the United States, particularly New York City, in large numbers. As is the case with any new

migrant population, the newcomers were seen as a threat by other ethnic communities. Racial tensions fueled violent outbursts during long hot summers in crowded neighborhoods. In 1926, thugs hired by ethnic merchants went on a rampage against Puerto Ricans in East Harlem, the neighborhood many had made their new home.

To provide support, protection and guidance for each other, Puerto Ricans formed hometown clubs in the East Harlem and Navy Yard neighborhoods in the 1920s.

Gradually, a sizeable Puerto Rican community emerged as migration swelled during post-war economic expansion in the United States. The Puerto Rican population rose from 69,967 in 1940 to 301,375 in 1950. Of these, over 80 percent resided in New York.

A number of community organizations, among them the Puerto Rican-Hispanic Leadership Forum¹, grew out of a desire to address the needs of the Puerto Rican community in New York City.

A Young Woman's Dream

Meanwhile, a young Puerto Rican woman who had arrived in 1944 with a cardboard suitcase and a goal to make it in America had been working her way up as a factory worker, artist, student, and teacher. Although trained as a teacher in Puerto Rico, she discovered that finding a job and being accepted into the mainstream was not easy.

"The old commonwealth mentality preached that if we just kept our noses clean and put our shoulders to the wheel, like so many immigrants before us, we too would one day find our place in the sun," she said.

"Actually, the reality was that, first of all, we were and are a people of color, who would not be easily accepted into the mainstream. Only those who passed as white moved up.

"Secondly, the city had already been made by others. We had no skills to speak of, and the modern city has no place for unskilled people.

"Thirdly, we came from a colony of the U.S. There already was a paternalistic, colonized pattern of discrimination against us."

That woman is Dr. Antonia Pantoja², the spark that brought to life the ASPIRA movement.



Antonia Pantoja

ASPIRA: The Early Years

"We started wondering what to do about the young people, how to motivate them to stay in school and go on to higher education," said Hernán LaFontaine³, one of the founders of ASPIRA. "We kept thinking of aspiring to higher education, and from that was born ASPIRA."

ASPIRA began as a project of the Puerto Rican/Hispanic Leadership Forum in 1961, as a result of many meetings of concerned community leaders in the offices of the Government of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico Migration Office, and the houses and apartments of Puerto Rican teachers, community leaders, and professionals.

"The common thread was that we were all Puerto Rican," LaFontaine said.

ASPIRA was originally conceived of by the Forum as a bilingual counseling agency to assist Puerto Rican youth through career guidance.

"The idea behind ASPIRA and its services is based on the reality that the intelligence and skill of the Puerto Rican community once trained and channeled can make a significant contribution to the life of the Puerto Rican and to the growth of the city as a whole," Pantoja said in ASPIRA's annual report in 1962.

ASPIRA's programs in these early years focused then, as they do now, on the development of Latino youth through education, leadership, and cultural awareness.

"We had great, great kids, and we did a lot of things together--not just the traditional things like SAT coaching and tutoring, but we also went places on the weekends with them and took them to conferences," LaFontaine said.

In ASPIRA's first year of operation (1961-1962), the founders listed four goals for its leadership workshops:

1. To provide for the students in a group situation the necessary orientation, information and stimulus to enable each student to prepare a sound practical educational plan to achieve his (sic) educational desire.
2. To help strengthen the student's ego and self image by awakening interest in and relating him to his cultural background.
3. To develop habits and capacities for self-help in pursuing an educational plan by knowing the resources and how to use them.
4. To stimulate those students with potential leadership capacity to be aware of their responsibilities to their own community.

Getting Started

ASPIRA began with a staff of seven, a small office at 137 West 72nd Street, and a plan to empower the Puerto Rican community by developing the leadership potential of young people.

In these early years, ASPIRA was still under the wing of the Puerto Rican/Hispanic Leadership Forum, so any new policies were subject to

the Forum's approval.

"The Board of Directors of the Puerto Rican/Hispanic Leadership Forum is the policy-making body of ASPIRA. It has relegated to a fifteen member ASPIRA committee the direct relationship with the agency's director. The ASPIRA committees meet with the director whenever necessary to discuss various aspects of the agency's work," Pantoja said in the annual report of 1962.

Building upon the strength of the dedication and commitment of the founders and the enthusiasm of the Puerto Rican community, and guided by the leadership of Executive Director Antonia Pantoja, ASPIRA developed cultural programs, started high school clubs, and provided counseling and references.

"It was important to have a concerted and very focused effort for the students to learn what it is to be Puerto Rican, including some of our history and how to feel good about oneself. That is what ASPIRA was doing, along with providing role models for the kids," LaFontaine said.

"It was great fun as we were able to see more kids get caught up with the fever of saying 'hey, it's not so bad to be Puerto Rican!'"

"Of course, the lack of money was a problem. We had virtually no money. Antonia was great at writing grants, but there wasn't always a lot of financial support," LaFontaine said.

ASPIRA Starts to Grow

By 1963 the agency had outgrown its first office, and moved to 296 5th Avenue. Already there were 52 ASPIRA clubs throughout the city.

The agency grew rapidly. By 1964-65, there were 827 students in the Educational Orientation Program, 532 students in the Leadership Development Program, and 137 parents in the Parent Education Program.

The federal Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) and the New York City Economic Opportunity Committee gave the agency a grant of \$267,000 to open three ASPIRA borough offices in Brooklyn, upper Manhattan and the Bronx.

Social Changes Shape the Nation

While ASPIRA worked to empower the community, a young, liberal movement of students, community leaders, politicians, and civil rights activists worked by its side, breaking down the barriers to social justice in the nation. The Civil Rights Act in 1964, the Voting Rights Act in 1965, the Economic Opportunity Act in 1965, and the Bilingual Education Act in 1968 reshaped the political and social consciousness of the nation.

"During those years, the ASPIRA students were extremely active," LaFontaine said.



ASPIRA Takes Flight

By 1965, ASPIRA was ready to leave the nest of the Forum and spread its wings to fly on its own.

"The year 1965-66 marked the end of ASPIRA's period of organization and establishment, and the beginning of a new stage of growth and enrichment," Pantoja wrote.

"Through the help of the Puerto Rican Forum, Inc., ASPIRA's sponsor, we have been incorporated, declared tax exempt, and a separate Board of Directors has been organized."

Pantoja resigned in August 1966 to accept a position as assistant professor in the Columbia University School of Social Work, leaving ASPIRA, Inc. in the hands of Mr. Frank Negrón, former director of the ASPIRA Bronx center.

Finding Funds

During the next few years, ASPIRA had to concentrate not only on building programs, but also on building a network of financial support to ensure the survival of the organization. In 1966-67 Negrón described the financial picture like this:

"Support from private foundations and corporations here and in Puerto Rico provided a vital one-fifth of ASPIRA's funds. These voluntary contributions increased by 66 percent, from \$85,565 to \$128,754. The common-

wealth of Puerto Rico contributed \$25,000. The balance of the agency's funds were derived from the Office of Economic Opportunity through the city's Human Resources Administration and the United States Office of Education in Washington."

Personnel changes brought new energy and ideas to the organization. Francisco Trilla, M.D., stepped down as the Chairman of the Board in 1966-67 and Gilbert Ortiz, M.D., became the new chairman. Luis Núñez replaced Frank Negrón as Executive Director in 1967-68.

ASPIRA began to attract financial support from private sources to build its programs, including large grants from the Vincent Astor Foundation, the New York Foundation, and the Carnegie Corporation. But perhaps the most significant contributions came from the Puerto Rican community. In 1968, ASPIRA held a dinner dance at the Commodore Hotel to honor ASPIRA founder Antonia Pantoja. One thousand people attended and \$34,557.75 was raised, proving that financial support for the organization could be found in the community. Parents of Aspirantes and Las Madrinass, a community support group of ASPIRA, sold tickets to the event.

ASPIRA Clubs and Members, 1961-1966

Year	Clubs	Members
1961-62	5	75
1962-63	12	200
1963-64	16	326
1964-65	20	532
1965-66	37	1483

The ASPIRA National Office

By 1969, ASPIRA had gone through almost ten years of growth, struggle and development. Based on the findings of two studies by ASPIRA aimed at defining the current distribution of Puerto Ricans and their status in the communities where they lived, ASPIRA sought and received support for extending its services on a nationwide scale. The ASPIRA movement was about to become the ASPIRA family.

In November 1968, the Ford Foundation made a two-and-a-half year development grant of \$650,000 to ASPIRA of New York to create a national office, ASPIRA of America. The Field Foundation made a \$25,000 grant for the expansion program. The Rockefeller Brothers Fund gave \$7,500 and the Henry Loeb Foundation gave \$3,500 to support a youth leadership conference. The New York Foundation gave \$10,000 for ASPIRA's summer program.

By September 1969, ASPIRA of America had established affiliate agencies in Newark, Philadelphia, Chicago and San Juan.

Puerto Rican Cultural Pride: The Young Lords Party

Meanwhile, the political climate continued to heat up in New York. In 1969, the Young Lords, originally a Chicago street gang that grew out of the ghetto experience of Puerto Ricans, established a chapter in New York City. The New York chapter soon broke away and became the Young Lords Party, instituting a number of public service projects in the Puerto Rican community, such as a free breakfast program for children in East Harlem and the development of a Puerto Rican student movement through the Puerto Rican Student Union.

Although the Lords gradually turned from community-based activities to organizing at the

workplace, they had a lasting impact on the political consciousness of young Puerto Ricans, reaffirming cultural pride among second-generation migrants, and reinforcing ASPIRA's efforts to instill cultural pride in youth.

Finding Funds: Round Two

While the country was discovering ways to raise consciousness, ASPIRA was again faced with the problem of raising money. In 1968-69, a major part of development and fundraising was set in motion with the establishment of the National Development Committee chaired by Teodoro Moscoso⁴, Chairman of the Board of Commonwealth Oil Refining Company and longtime friend of ASPIRA. Over 20 corporate and labor officials joined together to develop new sources of funding for ASPIRA of America.

With the hard work of Moscoso and others, funding sources were found and ASPIRA of America was able to continue its mission of developing youth leadership as the organization entered the 1970s. Executive Director Louis Núñez said in the 1970 annual report, "In its second full year of operation as a national office, ASPIRA of America experienced a year of exciting and encouraging growth. The five affiliates placed a record number of Puerto Rican students in college, involved 6,810 students in the ASPIRA program, and raised \$747,563 in private contributions to support the program."

"ASPIRA was a pioneer organization," Núñez recalls now

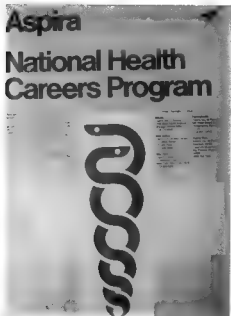


The Health Careers Program

ASPIRA of America was doing well, gaining financial support and recognition. Through the seventies, the organization focused on two areas: advocacy work and fundraising for developing national programs.

The Health Careers Program, first launched by ASPIRA of New York in 1970 with a \$10,000 grant from the Klingenstein Foundation, became a national program in 1971 when ASPIRA of America received a grant of \$75,000 from the National Urban Coalition.

"ASPIRA is recruiting and counseling Puerto Rican college students in each affiliate city, placing them in medical school, finding them scholarships and loans, and setting up summer internship jobs," said Louis Núñez in ASPIRA of America's 1970-71 annual report.



Developing the Association

Luis Alvarez² took over as Executive Director in 1972. Under his leadership, ASPIRA's national fundraising and program efforts were expanded.

"When Luis hired me in 1973, my title was Development Officer," recalls Wilfredo González³. "Eventually the title was changed to Director of Development because there was finally something for me to direct! Together we fashioned a unit to service the fundraising needs of the associate offices. We were able to hire a secretary and four fundraisers: one for New York, one for Puerto Rico, one for New Jersey and Pennsylvania, and one for Illinois. This was a major breakthrough, a more sophisticated approach to meeting funding needs both nationally and at the state and local levels.

"We also approached IBM and got them to give us a Puerto Rican executive-on-loan, Carlos Vallecillo⁴. In two years he systematized our internal operations and made a sophisticated organization out of a community group."

In 1974, ASPIRA of America received a 16-month, \$250,000 program grant from HEW's National Institute of Health for the Health Careers Program, and the program has grown steadily ever since, with principal funding from the Pew Memorial Trust, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (Public Health Service).

Standing up for Bilingual Education

Bilingual education was the key issue in the early seventies. In 1972, the Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund (PRLDEF) filed a suit in the United States District Court against the Board of Education of the City of New York on behalf of fifteen schoolchildren and their parents, ASPIRA of New York, Inc., ASPIRA of America, Inc. and other organizations.

The suit resulted in court-mandated bilingual education programs in the school system through the ASPIRA Consent Decree.

The ASPIRA Consent Decree

"The ASPIRA suit has made it possible for over 60,000 children to benefit from a bilingual instruction program. Had it not been for the Consent Decree, these children would have continued to languish in schools without the opportunity to meaningfully participate in the learning process, much less achieve their full potential," wrote Dr. Isaura Santiago¹² in her report on the case in 1977.

ASPIRA versus the Board of Education of the City of New York is a landmark case in the history of bilingual education. The PRLEDF filed the suit based on a wealth of evidence supporting the claim that Puerto Rican children of limited or no English speaking ability had been denied their civil rights by being denied equal educational opportunity. The complaint maintained that:

"Plaintiffs and the members of the classes they represent are Puerto Rican and other Spanish-speaking persons who speak English poorly or not at all. They are linguistically, culturally and historically different from the dominant culture in New York City.

Yet, the defendants have failed to recognize these differences in designing and implementing educational services and courses of study for plaintiffs. Specifically, they have failed to take into account the plaintiffs' inability to speak and understand English, and learn in classes conducted in the English language. Moreover, the defendants have not effectively taught the plaintiffs and their classes the English language. The failures of the defendant public officials have been catastrophic.

The rates of illiteracy, semi-literacy, dropouts and truancy in public schools for plaintiffs and their classes are shocking."

After much negotiation and litigation, United States District Court Judge Marvin E. Frankel issued the Consent Decree on August 29, 1974, ordering the Board of Education in New York City to implement bilingual programs in the public schools.

According to the Decree, these programs applied to "all children in first through twelfth grade whose English language deficiency prevented them from effectively participating in the learning process and who can participate more effectively in Spanish."

Although the Consent Decree was a significant move toward addressing the issue of bilingual education, many say that the Board of Education has not complied with the Decree. In 1988, Dr. Luis Reyes¹³ of ASPIRA of New York served on a New York State educational priorities panel whose report, *Ten Years of Neglect*, addressed the lack of compliance with the Consent Decree. ASPIRA and the New York City Board of Education settled a court case in August of that year to mandate the hiring of additional bilingual special education teachers and support personnel. Subsequently, ASPIRA of New York and other organizations in 1989 successfully pressured the New York State Board of Regents to pass a policy mandating renewed compliance with the Consent Decree and adding funds to the bilingual education budget.

Signs of the Times

The late seventies brought a realization that ASPIRA of America, no longer in its childhood, must change and grow as an organization. The nation was suffering the turmoil of an economic crisis that strangled the flow of government financial support available in earlier years. This led ASPIRA to target its fundraising efforts towards the private sector and the community.

In addition to this financial crisis, ASPIRA of America faced an organizational crisis as well. The local and national offices disagreed about their respective roles. What could be done to soothe the growing pains of the young ASPIRA, and prepare it to meet the responsibilities it faced as a maturing organization? In 1976, the organization restructured its board and discussed organizational roles.



"The national movement recognizes that the particular situation in which every ASPIRA finds itself varies from affiliate to affiliate, and that each affiliate's task is to respond to the particular needs in its own community," said Executive Director of ASPIRA of America Mario Anglada* in 1976. To address the variance between sites, ASPIRA established a national technical assistance unit to work directly with the associate offices on their fundraising and materials production needs.

Establishing a National Presence

Shortly after this time, ASPIRA stepped into the policy-making arena with a new presence in Washington D.C.

The ASPIRA-Rockefeller National Fellows in Education and Legislation Program offered year-long training and internship positions to young men and women in the field of educational policy making during the late seventies. In 1977 a Fellowship Coordinator's office was opened to Washington, DC signifying the first time ASPIRA had a continuous representative in the federal capital. Expanding on that office, the ASPIRA Center for Educational Equity (ACEE) was established in Washington in 1979 to act as ASPIRA's division for research and advocacy. The goal of ACEE was to enhance the means for research to be oriented and

organized to improve the schooling of Puerto Ricans and other Hispanics. ACEE disseminated research findings and information about Hispanic education to policy-makers through *Metas*, a quarterly scholarly journal; *Cutting Edge*, a quarterly news bulletin; *Hispanic Education Information Network*, a bimonthly newsletter;

and the Hispanic Forum for Responsive Education Policy, a monthly forum for federal officials that explored policy issues from a Hispanic perspective. ACEE received funds from the Ford Foundation, The National Institute of Education, and the Carnegie Corporation.

Although ACEE generated a number of important studies and successfully linked policy-makers with critical research on education for Hispanics, federal funding cuts in the early years

of the Reagan administration so restricted the Center's work that it was forced to close in 1982.

ASPIRA of America in the Eighties

Despite slashed budgets and a shaky financial foundation, ASPIRA of America locked off a decade of research and evaluation in the 1980s. The associate offices were conducting research studies, particularly on the issue of Hispanic dropouts.

ASPIRA was also evaluating its own performance. Executive directors, board members, and staff members began to discuss some of the organizational and financial problems of the ASPIRA family.

"When I arrived in 1983 it was evident that the sense of unity was in peril," said former National Executive Director Juan Rosario.¹³ "People were pulling in different directions."



Juan Rosario

Tension arising around relationships between the national and local offices threatened to weaken the association, according to Rosario. ASPIRA was suffering the typical strain between centralization and decentralization experienced by most multi-site organizations.

The Mission

"A change had to be made," Rosario said. The organization needed to reemphasize its original mission: improving the socio-economic conditions of the Puerto Rican/Latino community through youth leadership development and education.

"I felt that the mission had to have three goals: leadership development, educational development and advocacy," Rosario said.

In order to realize the goal of advocacy, the organization's leadership discussed relocating the national office to Washington, D.C., closer to the nation's legislators and home to the national headquarters of many organizations.



The Name

Rosario felt that the name of the organization was another problem contributing to confusion about the best role the six local offices and the national office could each play in advancing ASPIRA's mission.

The name ASPIRA of America was identified with the national office only.

"It implied that it was a seventh entity. The national office needed to become a vehicle for the affiliates," Rosario said.

By 1985, discussions between board members, national and local staff, funders, and heads of other national organizations were summarized in a report entitled *Mirando Hacia el Futuro: A National Office Feasibility Study for the ASPIRA Association*.

At the 1985 annual meeting, the National Board of Directors unanimously approved the recommendations to relocate the national office to Washington, D.C. and to change the ASPIRA of America name to one that would better reflect an image of unity.

The ASPIRA Association, Inc.

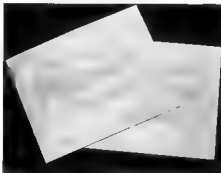
ASPIRA of America officially became the ASPIRA Association in 1985. Since then, the organization has continued to grow stronger through a realization of its goals and the administrative and financial autonomy of each local office.

Research and Advocacy at the National Level

Meanwhile, ASPIRA continued to develop its mission through research and advocacy activities at the national level. The Institute for Policy Research was established in Washington D C in 1985. It began research for the longitudinal **ASPIRA Five Cities High School Dropout Study**, examining school, home and student characteristics for their effects on school retention.

In the same year, the first group of Aspirantes to participate in the national component of the **ASPIRA Public Policy Leadership Program (APPLP)**, a three phase program funded by the Ford Foundation, came to Washington D.C. to work with national mentors and learn first-hand the skills of leadership and policy-making at the federal level.

The ASPIRA Institute for Policy Research continued its action-oriented research through the eighties, marked by the publication of *Northeast Hispanic Needs: A Guide for Action* in 1987; as well as a number of parent-involvement materials in 1989-90 as part of the Hispanic Community Mobilization for Dropout Prevention (HCMDP) project, funded by the Department of Education.



The year 1990 also saw the release of three reports based on the **ASPIRA Five Cities High School Dropout Study** and the expansion of ASPIRA's contacts with federal officials.

The national office continues in its role in the ASPIRA Association, advocating on behalf of the organization and its mission for Latino youth, conducting studies through the Institute for Policy Research, providing technical assistance to the associate offices, and acting as a national voice for the organization. The national programs continue to thrive through the hard work of the associate offices, and the organization, rejuvenated and reunited, plans to expand in the coming decade.

We now turn to the individual histories of each of the associate offices. Each office is unique in its activities, and yet united to the ASPIRA movement by the common goal of community empowerment through the development of youth leadership.



The first group of APPLP National Interns pose during their graduation ceremony.

ASPIRA OF NEW YORK, INC.

"The thirtieth anniversary represents three decades of a lot of struggle, three decades of a tremendous amount of work," said Julia Rivera, present Executive Director of ASPIRA of New York. For ASPIRA of New York, the creation of ASPIRA of America was only a slight interruption of their work serving the Puerto Rican community in New York City carrying out the ASPIRA mission.

For a brief time, Executive Director Louis Núñez headed both ASPIRA of New York and ASPIRA of America, until it was determined that ASPIRA of America needed its own executive director and separate offices, Núñez said. Núñez became Executive Director of ASPIRA of America and Louis Nieves¹⁸ took over as Executive Director of ASPIRA of New York, renamed from ASPIRA, Inc.

In 1970, ASPIRA of New York lacked off the decade with the creation of CREO: Creating Resources for Educational Opportunity.

"High school juniors who had previously attended school sporadically, if at all, now stay for tutoring sessions after school, and their grades show a marked improvement," wrote National Executive Director Luis Alvarez in the 1971-72 annual report. The Office of Economic Opportunity funded the program.

"This unprecedented opportunity for ASPIRA

to play a key role in creating and developing new educational models will, hopefully, directly influence the New York City school system and its approach to education," said Louis Nieves in 1971.

Established programs continued to help the Puerto Rican community empower itself. The Parent-Student Guidance Program tripled the number of families it was able to reach in its second year of operation.

New York surged forward in its strong advocacy role by arranging, at the invitation of the White House Task Force on Race and Minor-



ity Problems, a day long hearing in 1971 on Puerto Ricans in New York. The ASPIRA Club Federation took charge of the project. The Young Lords, The East Harlem Youth Coalition and the Hispanic Apostolic Society were invited.

Despite the hard work of ASPIRA of New York, statistics still painted a grim picture for Puerto Rican youth. According to the 1971-72 annual report, the high school dropout rate for Puerto Rican students in New York City in 1971 was 70 percent.

Fighting the System

It was time to take action and address the problems in the educational system. Louis Nieves, with the support of the community, urged the Board of Education to establish a bilingual education office. ASPIRA board members and lawyers organized the Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund (PRLDEF), a group devoted to litigation of test cases on behalf of Puerto Rican interests. Their first action was to file the class action suit against the New York City Board of Education 1972, to address the need for bilingual education in New York City Schools (see ASPIRA Consent Decree, previous section).

1972 and 1973 were tough years financially for ASPIRA of New York. Funds for several programs were cut back, and renewed funding of the innovative CREO program was denied by the Office of Economic Opportunity. ASPIRA of New York was busy trying to save the programs it had worked so hard to build, and fight for reform in the schools' bilingual education policy. The next year, the hard work paid off.

New Executive Director Mario Anglada said in 1974, "This year saw the beginning of the most important advocacy function ever undertaken by ASPIRA of New York, Inc., when Judge Marvin E. Frankel, of the United States District Court in New York City, ordered ASPIRA and the Board of Education to propose bilingual education plans for Hispanic New York City public school children when they cannot communicate effectively in English."

ASPIRA in the Seventies: Wearing Several Hats

The middle seventies marked the beginning of an important development in ASPIRA of New York's research work.

In 1974-75, ASPIRA created a new department for research. Funded by the Carnegie Corporation, it was called the Planning, Evaluation, and Research Unit.

In the same year, the ASPIRA Parent Training Institute began to provide parents of children in the public schools with information about their children's schooling, covering such topics as school board elections, files, PTA's, bilingual education and school zoning.

The focus of the associate's work, however, remained on the students. In 1975-76, ASPIRA of New York began the Student Guidance Program, which was to "stimulate and improve positive interaction and understanding between urban ghetto schools and the students' parents, between the schools and the students, and between parents and their children."

Changing Times

The late seventies marked a change in the social and political mood of the nation. ASPIRA of New York struggled to continue its programs under repeated funding cuts, the rising costs of college tuition and housing, and a shift away from the liberal, community action spirit that had swept the nation and faded away.

The Reagan administration dealt a harsh blow to the financial security of many community organizations.

"A lot of programs the federal government used to fund were cut back," said Dr. Luis O. Reyes, former Director of Research and Advocacy at ASPIRA of New York.

The young organization was now in its teens, typically a period of readjustment, frustration, and rapid growth. Board members and executive directors debated the best strategies for pursuing ASPIRA's mission and goals.



Luis Reyes

"The associates felt that the national office needed to provide support but not meddle," said Reyes.

Survival

Being pulled in so many directions at once—providing expert testimony and advice, educating legislators, developing and implementing programs, fundraising, dealing with emerging community needs—it is not surprising that ASPIRA of New York, like each of the other associates, had difficulty merely staying alive during this trying time. But ASPIRA of New York managed to ride out the storm. In school year 1981-82, 447 students in 14 ASPIRA clubs kept the ASPIRA mission alive.

ASPIRA of New York helped to develop the New York State Adolescent Vocational Exploration Program, (A.V.E.) The goal of A.V.E. was to help youths between the ages of 14 and 17 clarify their career and educational goals.

For the third consecutive year, ASPIRA of New York provided professional management and administration for the Mayor's Scholarship Program, giving information, counseling, and financial aid to 466 students out of 2,337 applicants. The 466 students received \$209,440 in support of their college educations.

Bilingual Education Under Fire

Once again, bilingual education was under attack in 1982 when Chancellor Frank Macchiarola tried to dismantle bilingual education programs in the City's schools through a letter to Latino parents encouraging them indirectly to remove or refuse to register their children in bilingual classes. The Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund took the Chancellor to court December 7, 1982. By the end of December, the Court ruled that the Board of Education must meet with the PRLDEF lawyers to negotiate a compromise.

The meeting resulted in an agreement to issue a new letter reaffirming the original process

arranged under the Consent Decree of informing parents of bilingual education programs.

Research

Economist Richard Calitri¹⁷ conducted a study for ASPIRA of New York entitled "Racial and Ethnic High School Dropout Rates in New York City". The results of the study, produced in 1983, showed that the dropout rate for Hispanics had actually worsened from 1960 to 1980, and the overall unemployment rate in NYC for youth 16-21 who were dropouts rose from 53 percent in 1970 to 73 percent in 1980. Calitri concluded from his study that the dropout crisis for Puerto Ricans and other Hispanics from the New York City public high schools should be the number one educational priority for the Hispanic community.

Back on Track

The middle eighties brought the previously mentioned internal restructuring of the relationship between the associates and the national office. The end result: a clarification of organizational roles and goals that has since bolstered the vitality of the organization.

"The major impact (of the restructuring) was in establishing clearer lines in terms of fundraising," said Jane Bello¹⁸, former Deputy Director of Development for ASPIRA of New York.

ASPIRA of New York moved forward in its program development, strengthening the Leadership Program, the Talent Search Program, the Health Careers program. It also developed new programs, such as the Dropout Prevention Initiative, funded by the Coca-Cola USA Foundation.

ASPIRA of New York began to expand its fundraising efforts to the corporate and private sector throughout the eighties, and develop programs to tap the support of Alumni. Past Aspirantes provided not only financial support, but also the support of the skills and knowledge they brought back to the community.

National programs such as the APPLP and the Health Careers program reinforced these efforts, empowering communities through the leadership and education of youth as ASPIRA of New York headed into the nineties. In 1989-90 over 500 students were active in 30 ASPIRA Clubs. An additional 2,800 received direct services from the New York office. But ASPIRA's services extend beyond its active caseload. The office administers academic scholarships that reach an additional 27,600 students. Since 1988 it has held "Stay in School" musical rallies that attract thousands of city residents.

A Resurgence of Advocacy

A renewed focus on advocacy for dropout prevention and bilingual education was marked by the class action suit *Jose P. v. the Board of Education* in 1988. The agreement between ASPIRA and the Board of Education settling that suit mandated the hiring of 950 new bilingual employees, including 350 bilingual special education teachers and 600 bilingual evaluators, psychologists, and social workers. These personnel were to work with the estimated 10-15,000 special education students of limited-English proficiency in the school district. At the same time, ASPIRA was instrumental in organizing a coalition of Latino groups to advocate for increased sensitivity to Latino issues by the Board of Education. The group submitted an Action Plan for improved Latino school performance to the schools chancellor, and pushed hard to make the plan a reality.

"Our major concerns are always to ensure that school officials are sensitive to Latino needs and that the programs implemented also benefit the Latino population," said Executive Director Julia Rivera at the time.

The following year, ASPIRA and a coalition of agencies succeeded in getting a statewide regents' policy passed mandating that all school districts in New York must identify and provide appropriate language services to all eligible students.



Julia Rivera (center), and former Board Chair Roberto Rodriguez (right), of ASPIRA of New York, meet with Emanuel Ortiz, ASPIRA of Pennsylvania (left).

ASPIRA of New York empowered its students to become advocates as well through involvement in the "Somos Uno" Hispanic Affairs Conferences. In 1991 the conference expanded to include a formal youth leadership conference as well, and ASPIRA brought 400 students from throughout New York State to the event. The students had spent six months in roundtable discussions, mini-conferences, and trainings. They prepared a legislative agenda for Latino youth which they presented to legislators during the conference.

ASPIRA of New York enters the nineties with a renewed commitment to the ASPIRA mission through a dual strategy of entering into partnerships with school systems while exposing and confronting the problems in these systems.

Rivera said recently, "When I was a high school student my counselor asked me, 'Why do you want to go to college?' Education was being used to screen the labor force. There was only a select group in key decision-making positions. Our people were discouraged from going to college. But ASPIRA was coming out and saying 'Hey, you can be a doctor or a lawyer.'

"Now we need more technical knowledge. Today in the 1990's we still have people saying 'Why do you want to go to college?' We have to create awareness on the part of educators that just because a young person is black or Puerto Rican doesn't mean they are less able to compete...In the '90s, all students are at risk."

ASPIRA, INC., OF ILLINOIS

"We had just had a riot in 1966. During that time a group of us wanted to know what in the world has caused such anger," said Mirta Ramírez, a founder of ASPIRA of Illinois.

"A group of us started a little tutoring center. I was going to college at the time and I found a description of ASPIRA. I called the director of ASPIRA in New York, and he sent me some information. Then we got some friends together," Ramírez said.

Under the establishing grant that created ASPIRA of America, ASPIRA of Illinois was brought to life. Ramírez was its Executive Director for the first four months, followed by Sylvia Herrera de Fox.

"The first programs were centered around the establishment of five or six clubs," said present Executive Director Aida Sánchez, who was an Aspirante in 1969. Sánchez said the students were involved in advocacy, college preparation courses, student exchange programs with Puerto Rico, and counseling.

The need for such an agency as ASPIRA was great. In 1970, 100,000 Puerto Ricans lived in Chicago. Almost half of these were school age. It was predicted that as many as 60 percent would drop out before they completed high school.

ASPIRA of Illinois grew rapidly, doubling the number of students placed in college from 109 in 1970 to 228 in 1971. There were nine clubs with 291 Aspirantes; the Puerto Rican Institute of Studies, a full time program for high school dropouts; and Project Think, a full time college accredited program.

Spreading Like Wildfire

"In the beginning, there was more emphasis on advocacy. Advocacy was a real burning hot

issue," Sánchez said.

The organization was growing up in the heat of the movement for equal rights, equal opportunity, and an end to racial discrimination.

"Before, there were protests, marches. Now, there are negotiations, meetings," Sánchez recalls.

With generous support from the City of Chicago and private funders like the Field Foundation, ASPIRA of Illinois focused on the problem of the high school dropout rate in its program development. Under a grant from the Chicago Committee of Urban Opportunity, ASPIRA began the Neighborhood Youth Corps Program in 1971, aimed at 16-18 year old high school dropouts.

By 1973, ASPIRA of Illinois counted 15 clubs with 600 members.



The ASPIRA Bilingual Alternative School and Project 55, a program providing part-time jobs in tutoring and educational peer counseling, were fighting the dropout problem and empowering the Puerto Rican community to realize its full potential.

A tough financial year hit ASPIRA of Illinois in 1973-74. Club membership dropped to 411 members in 14 clubs, but ASPIRA of Illinois launched a new project: the Aspira-Mexican American Council on Education Bilingual Tutorial Project.

The new project was a reading program for Latino elementary school children, with local cooperation and support from the Chicago League of Women Voters, the Mexican-American Council on Education, the Chicago Consortium of Colleges and Universities, the Chicago Board of Education, the PTA Region, the Chicago Principals Association, the Chicago Teachers Union, and the Chicago Board of Education.

Executive Director Carmelo Rodríguez² wrote in 1975, "This has been a most exciting and needed effort. It has extended to many of our socio-economically and culturally isolated youngsters in the elementary schools a life raft; the helping hand of very committed and prepared tutors."

Thus, true to the spirit of the *pitirre*, ASPIRA overcame its financial troubles, soaring into the mid-seventies with a successful new tutoring project and a 300 percent staff increase in 1975-76. The office secured major grants for research and program development, and built its club membership to over 700 members. Counseling and education accompanied the leadership development program, and ASPIRA started a junior high school ASPIRA club.

Dropping Out: Uncovering a Chronic Problem

The dropout problem continued to plague Latino communities in Chicago, even as the number of Aspirantes finishing high school and going on to college rose steadily.

The ASPIRA Chicago Dropout Study found that more than 70 percent of students entering two predominantly Hispanic high schools in 1979 did not graduate.

Further, the study showed that school officials attempted to mask the actual dropout rate through the use of inappropriate formulae and statistics. For example, a school with a dropout rate of 17 percent in year one, 15 percent in year

two, 16 percent in year three, and 17 percent in year four, would be reported at a rate of 16 percent. However, at these yearly rates the school would have graduated only 49 percent of the incoming freshman class of year one.



In the study, nearly one in three males and one in six females gave fear of gangs as the reason they dropped out before graduating. One in six males and females said they were told to leave by administrators, counselors, or teachers; and 28% of females cited having a baby as their main reason for dropping out.

"The youths interviewed during the study repeatedly reported incidents indicating that gangs are a pervasive force in the schools... There is a need for action by the school administration to reduce the fear and apprehension which students feel due to gangs," wrote Charles L. Kyle Ph.D.³, author of the study.

To dramatize the report's findings, ASPIRA staff, students, Dr. Kyle, and the Network for Youth Services planned a candlelight vigil and march to Roberto Clemente High School on March 26, 1984. Pallbearers carried a coffin symbolizing the young people who had dropped out of school and died in gang warfare, while the over 500 marchers' flickering candles symbolized their hope for the community's future. Pressure from the newly-united Latino community eventually led to the appointment by the state legislature of a 20-member Joint Task Force

on Hispanic Dropouts, and by the following year, 1985, the legislature passed several dropout prevention measures recommended by the Task Force.

The Eighties: Crisis and Recovery

"We did have a crisis in Illinois in the early eighties; the executive director resigned and we went through three executive directors in three years," said María Seidner, Manager of Bilingual Education for the Illinois State Board of Education and an ASPIRA of Illinois board member.

"In spite of all that turmoil, the organization was able to carry out its functions," Seidner said.

ASPIRA of Illinois wisely prepared for any impending financial crisis.

"In the early eighties, our board was trying to expand our general operating budget so we would not be damaged if funding went down. We invested in some stocks and money markets," Seidner said.

"We had two or three years where we were treading water," Seidner said. But ASPIRA of Illinois kept its head above water, seeking community funding sources, such as United Way. Seidner said that ASPIRA was able to keep its core programs alive, focusing in the eighties on dropout prevention and drug education.

"I see ASPIRA as an organization that is always there and always meets the needs of the students," Seidner said.

Finding Alternatives to Dropping Out

In 1984, ASPIRA of Illinois began the ASPIRA Coca Cola Educational Support Services Project (Project A.C.C.E.S.S.). The project was designed to help Hispanics who are at risk of dropping out of high school. Supported by the Coca Cola USA Foundation, the project showed that students aided by support services were more likely to remain in school through graduation.

For those students who had already dropped out, ASPIRA opened its Alternative High School

in 1987. The school provided personalized, bicultural classes for sixty students each year, leading to a high school diploma sponsored by Holy Trinity High School. In 1989 the school received its own certification to grant diplomas as a secondary school from the State of Illinois.

Through the late eighties, ASPIRA of Illinois divided its time between developing its role as an advocate for education for Latino youth and expanding its programs to other areas.

"In the beginning, people were skeptical, but now that we have a proven track record, we have credibility in the Chicago area. I think we've been able to really establish the programs as programs people depend on," Sánchez said.

At the same time, Sánchez noted that because their programs are well-established in the community there is a great demand for their services. Unfortunately, ASPIRA's staff cannot meet all of these demands.

As Chicago has gone through a sweeping school reform in the past two years, ASPIRA has worked with its parents, empowering them to play an active role in the local school councils that now make many policy decisions for each school.

"We have to do a balancing act between service and advocacy. For me it is more difficult to keep on top of advocacy because we don't have sufficient full-time staff to devote to it," Sánchez



Aida Sánchez



noted. "The dilemma for us is making sure the service aspect doesn't take away from the mission of community empowerment."

Finding a Place in Diversity

Because Chicago's Hispanic population has always been multi-ethnic, ASPIRA of Illinois has tried to strike a balance between offering its services to the larger Hispanic population while emphasizing Puerto Rican culture and heritage.

"The agency here has become more multi-ethnic in terms of the population it serves," Seidner noted.

At the same time, the Aspirantes themselves have helped to maintain a knowledge of the Puerto Rican culture and experience. The Pitirre Theater and Dance Group, made up of Aspirantes from several schools, has written and produced several plays, including "The Story of an Immi-

grant Puerto Rican" in 1989 and "Una Postal Navideña" in 1990.

The Nineties: Expansion and Diversity

ASPIRA of Illinois heads into the nineties with two clear cut trends: expansion and diversification.

In 1987 the office received a grant from the Joyce Foundation to increase the number of ASPIRA Clubs, and by 1990 the number had gone from ten to fourteen. In 1991 the office was invited to open several new clubs in Chicago suburbs.

Seidner said the Board has diversified, now looks for "talent rather than ethnicity," and is more sophisticated in its fundraising. She notes that ASPIRA has propelled Hispanics into high positions, changing the face of the professional society significantly. ASPIRA acknowledged this success in 1988 by locking off its 20th anniversary celebration with a tribute to twenty prominent Chicago Aspirantes.

"There has been a parade of young professionals who have passed through ASPIRA at one point or another in their lives. The Treasurer of the City of Chicago, Miriam Santos, is an Aspirante," Seidner said. "There were no elected officials when I first came. Now, we have people in high places."



ASPIRA of Illinois Board Chair José Matos talks with Fernando Figueredo of the Board of ASPIRA of Florida.

ASPIRA, INC., OF NEW JERSEY

"For the Puerto Rican student the probability of dropping out before high school graduation is over 85 percent," wrote Juan Rosario, founding Executive Director of ASPIRA of New Jersey, in the first annual report in 1969.

The need for an organization such as ASPIRA was alarmingly clear from statistics such as these.

"In working in the Jersey City Neighborhood Youth Corps, I became increasingly convinced of the importance of developing the leadership potential of young people," Rosario said.

ASPIRA of New Jersey in its early years focused on finding ways to reduce the dropout rate, develop leadership, and develop resources for the community.

"At that time, there were no more than 100 Latino college students in the state, and very few Puerto Rican teachers or lawyers, Rosario said.

But the problem of staying in school actually started much earlier, because according to Rosario, none of the school systems in the state at that time had bilingual education. ASPIRA of New Jersey wasted no time in breaking down the barriers of the education system.

"In Newark, we were very active in getting



Education to implement bilingual education. I personally was responsible to chair a community

effort to do this. We had to recruit over 300 teachers," Rosario said.

Beating the Odds



In many cases, ASPIRA of New Jersey faced overwhelming odds. In 1970-71, due in part to a three month long teacher's strike, out of almost 10,000 Puerto Ricans in the Newark

School system, only 101 graduated from high school. But through the work of ASPIRA counselors and the strength of peer support in the ASPIRA high school clubs, ASPIRA relentlessly fought big problems by building community strength through small victories. In 1971, ASPIRA headed the committee on teachers' recruitment of the Mayor's task force on education, advocating on behalf of Puerto Rican students in New Jersey schools.

By 1973-74, ASPIRA of New Jersey counted 363 members total in the combined memberships of the Newark, Paterson, and Hudson County ASPIRA leadership clubs.

The Health Careers Program and Talent Search Program boasted overwhelming success in getting students to further their education.

ASPIRA of New Jersey Blossoms

During the late seventies, ASPIRA of New Jersey grew rapidly, expanding its services from about 400 students in 1973 to almost 700 in 1976. The number of college placements skyrocketed to a high of almost 400 in 1977. The Hudson County Center was opened under a grant from the Law Enforcement Administration Act.

**ASPIRA of New Jersey:
Students Served 1969-1977**

year	new students	continuing students	total students served
69-70	323	—	323
70-71	362	189	551
71-72	395	440	835
72-73	395	427	822
73-74	570	137	707
74-75	698	452	1150
75-76	706	748	1454
76-77	706	922	1628

Total Students Served 1969-1977: 4,155

ASPIRA Advocates on Behalf of Youth

"In December, (1977) ASPIRA chaired the first Statewide Conference of Hispanics on Higher Education with over 150 representatives of New Jersey's Hispanic organizations and institutions of higher education in attendance. As a result of the conference, The New Jersey Association of Hispanics in Higher Education was established to urge improvements in affirmative action, admissions, and bilingual education," wrote Executive Director Grizel Ubarry²⁰ in the 1977-78 annual report.

Finding Funds: The End of an Era

Yet despite ASPIRA of New Jersey's success in reaching students and building communities, the grim reality of funding cuts and spiraling inflation loomed ahead. The associate faced the beginning of the eighties and the end of an era of widespread support for community organizations from the federal government. A decade of soaring success was coming to a close with stormy skies on the horizon. ASPIRA of New Jersey began to search out new funding sources and rethink its management strategies. Under the dynamic leadership of María Vizcarrondo DeSoto²¹, new Executive Director who was an Aspirante in the mid-sixties, ASPIRA of New Jersey got back on its feet.

In her first year as Executive Director, Vizcarrondo developed a five-year strategic plan that she called her "blueprint to operate."

Under her management, the office funds went

from a deficit to a surplus. Funding increased by 30 percent, and for the first time the associate had a finance department and a director of development.

With new funding, ASPIRA of New Jersey was able to expand its services to programs in elementary school through college. The number of students served more than tripled.



María Vizcarrondo-DeSoto

Expansion

The associate grew geographically as well. In addition to the main office in Newark, ASPIRA of New Jersey opened centers in Trenton, Paterson, Jersey City, and Camden. In 1986, the governor of New Jersey hailed the associate as one of the outstanding organizations in the state in leadership and educational enrichment.

"After years of negotiating," Vizcarrondo commented in 1987, "we are now really a state-wide agency."

Hilda Rosario, a native of Puerto Rico whose first job on the mainland was as counselor for ASPIRA of New York, took over the organization determined to continue the programmatic and economic growth Vizcarrondo had started.

"We need to determine how to strategically

expand," she said soon after her appointment. "Tied in with this, we need to ensure that we continually maintain and increase our fundraising level."

ASPIRA of New Jersey has worked hard to involve their alumni in events, planning an alumni association in 1989 and holding an annual Alumni Cruise and a Christmas Dance. Through their alumni network ASPIRA gains financial support, recognition, and volunteers.



Hilda Rosario greets María Marcado, a founder of ASPIRA of New Jersey and former National Board Chair, and Aspirante Orsini González at New Jersey's 20th Anniversary Banquet in 1988.

As it expanded to sites around the state, the associate began a quarterly newsletter, *El Clarín*, to both keep its wide-ranging staff informed and also maintain ASPIRA's high visibility in the state.

During the 1989-90 program year the associate served 1,615 students through its five offices, with another 1,202 students participating in one of its many conferences, workshops, or cultural events.

1990: Fiestas and a Home

ASPIRA of New Jersey had a strong background in academic and career assistance. In the summer and fall of 1990, it helped its Aspirantes to also get to know

their cultural roots through participation in two big "fiestas." More than 200 ASPIRA students, staff, and friends replicated the celebration of the "Fiestas de Loiza Aldea," a traditional town festival, during Newark's annual Puerto Rican Day Parade. Dancers, actors, and musicians brought a splash of Puerto Rico to the streets of Newark. The event proved so successful that the "ASPIRA Dance Troupe" continued to present traditional dances at events around the state

In fall of 1990, over 400 students, staff, and volunteers put together a four-day "Fiestas Patronales de ASPIRA" carnival. Rides, games, dancing, and food were there for all to enjoy, with proceeds going to the associate's capital campaign. They are attempting to raise \$1.5 million to buy the building they currently rent.

"We want a place where the kids can come after school to study, work in the computer room, have private conferences with their counselors and get off the streets," said Elsa Núñez-Wormack²⁵, former Chair of the New Jersey Board of Directors. She dreams of opening an alternative high school or even a day-care center. "The teenagers love it here, it's a comfortable place."



Aspirantes march with their float in the New Jersey Puerto Rican Day Parade.

ASPIRA, INC., OF PENNSYLVANIA

ASPIRA of Pennsylvania was established in Philadelphia in 1969 in the true spirit of community empowerment, with board and staff members pitching in to make the opening of the new office a success. Domingo Martínez²⁶, Chairman of the Board and owner of a leading travel agency, worked through a maze of electrical wiring in the new ASPIRA office. Vice Chairman Ramón Velázquez²⁷ treated the invited delegation from New York to a full scale Puerto Rican banquet in his restaurant.

By 1971, the affiliate was reaching out to the youth of the Puerto Rican population in the greater Philadelphia area. Nine high school clubs boasted 408 members that year and 67 Aspirantes were placed in college.

Parents lost no time getting involved in the new organization--25 of them began to meet to discuss issues important to their children's education in the newly created Parents Federation.

Advocacy for Higher Education

ASPIRA of Pennsylvania's advocacy in 1971 had secured 50 places for qualified Aspirantes at Penn State University, which were unfortunately withdrawn the next year. But ASPIRA was not going to give up. Through staff pressure and local radio stations, ASPIRA won back 35 places. Membership in 10 clubs skyrocketed to over 500 students.

In 1973 ASPIRA of Pennsylvania began to reach out to younger Aspirantes. A junior high school program started, modeled after the very successful high school clubs.

A Vicious Circle

The demographics of Philadelphia in the mid-seventies presented a situation that seemed hopeless. Forty percent of all Puerto Rican households in the City of Brotherly Love had incomes below \$3,000 in 1973.

The dropout problem was a vicious circle. Youth felt compelled to help out their families by quitting school and finding jobs, only to realize that they were putting themselves in the same economic situation by not completing their education and thus limiting their potential.

The ASPIRA Process offered a way out of this situation, and 750 members of 14 ASPIRA clubs in 1973 were willing to give it a try.



Emanuel Ortiz with Aspirantes at a leadership development activity.

Fighting for Educational Rights

In 1975, the Puerto Rican community, assisted by ASPIRA and the Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund, brought a class action suit against the Philadelphia Board of Education. It required that the school district provide identification, testing, and placement of limited-English proficient students in bilingual programs. An agreement was reached between both parties resulting in improved bilingual services for Philadelphia's students.

The Late Seventies

The twilight of the seventies marked a shift in ASPIRA of Pennsylvania's approach to fund raising. This liberal decade was coming to a close with government funds lost in the quicksand of an economic recession.

"Funding is always our biggest problem," noted Pennsylvania Executive Director Emanuel Ortiz.

Finding Funds in the Reagan Era

In the early eighties ASPIRA of Pennsylvania sought expert help. The associate hired a consultant to help find and secure funding sources and broaden its funding base.

"We saw the need to become independent. We started approaching the corporations and private sector," said ASPIRA of Pennsylvania Director of Finances Nilda M. Cintrón.

Research--Understanding the Problem

While struggling to find funds, ASPIRA of Pennsylvania continued its work to fulfill the ASPIRA mission, launching a major research project in 1981 called **Dropping Out and Delinquency Among Puerto Rican Youths: A Longitudinal Study**. Directed by Manuel J. Gutiérrez²⁸ and Braulio Montalvo²⁹ and funded by the National Institute of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, U.S. Department of Justice, the study sought to identify links between dropping out and delinquency, explore whether the reasons for dropping out among Puerto Rican youths in Philadelphia had changed, and search for differences between students in public and parochial schools.

"We have a very high dropout rate. We wanted to find out why," Cintrón said.

The study found that more than one-third (34.7 percent) of youngsters entering the tenth grade left school by their senior year. Both delinquency and dropping out were related to a balance of family, peer, and institutional forces.



If the family lost too much influence over the student and the school did nothing to compensate, the student's peers became the most important influence in his or her life. This peer pressure could lead to delinquency and dropping out.

To address the dropout and delinquency problems, the study recommended increased parental participation in making schools accountable, an overhaul of the bilingual education program, work-study programs, and planning and generating long-term changes in socioeconomic conditions.

The Eighties: A Wider Audience

For ASPIRA of Pennsylvania, the eighties ushered in a time to develop the strengths of ASPIRA of Pennsylvania.

"We had a good reputation, and I was able to build on that," said Ortiz. "I networked to make ASPIRA known in the broader community, beyond just the Latino community. We worked towards becoming an institution whereas before we had been seen as just a small neighborhood organization."

Ortiz participated in numerous city and state task forces, and took an active role in speaking out for educational rights for Philadelphia's Puerto Rican community. In addition, with the publication in 1987 of the report, "Premarital Sexual Relations and Pregnancy Among Puerto

Rican Youths," by Manuel Gutiérrez, ASPIRA put the spotlight on the extent and seriousness of this problem for adolescent Puerto Ricans in the city.

The office began providing services to a younger population, working with more middle school students through its Talent Search program. It also began working in vocational training, providing over 100 students with private sector jobs each summer to allow them to explore career options and also contribute to their family's income. Aspirantes hosted a half-hour bilingual radio talk show each week on a local radio station, increasing ASPIRA's visibility in the community and allowing its message to reach a wider audience. Latino community members in Harnsburg, Pennsylvania reached out for help from the Philadelphia office in 1989, forming a "Friends of ASPIRA" group for their young people.

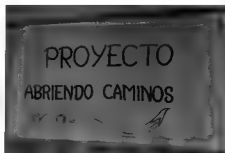
As its programs grew, its management and financial structures were hard-pressed to keep up, but ASPIRA of Pennsylvania was determined to provide quality services to as many students as possible.



The Antonia Pantoja Community Learning Center

The Antonia Pantoja Center

In 1987 ASPIRA of Pennsylvania was given an abandoned fire station by the City of Philadelphia. After a year of renovations, it opened in 1988 as the Antonia Pantoja Community Learning Center. The Center provided classroom space for several of ASPIRA's programs, including its highly-successful *Abriendo Caminos* project, a personalized, bilingual school for 100 former dropouts that combines GED preparation with personal and career counseling and job placement. It also housed a computerized Com-



munity Learning Program and the ASPIRA Parents Council.

More than 150 well-wishers turned out for the opening of the Center, and Dr. Pantoja was the guest of honor. She proved to have lost none of her drive in the years since ASPIRA's founding, telling gathered Aspirantes, "I know the fires are burning inside of you for learning. ASPIRA will help you aspire to reach your goal. You can do it, if you set your mind to succeed . . . We must all strive for social justice so that you will lift yourselves and the Latino community from the cycle of poverty which oppresses us."

ASPIRA, INC., OF PUERTO RICO

"ASPIRA's members in San Juan, Ponce, and other places on the island don't suffer by being members of a minority group, but they come from the same kinds of homes as ASPIRA's members in Newark or Chicago, and they have many of the same problems," noted ASPIRA of Puerto Rico's annual report, 1970-71.

ASPIRA of Puerto Rico is unique in its location, but united with the other affiliates in its mission to develop the leadership of Puerto Rican youth to. As the first private agency to work with the public education system on the island, over the years ASPIRA of Puerto Rico has developed a number of innovative programs and has successfully advocated on behalf of Puerto Rican students.

Higher Education for Puerto Rican Youth

In 1971, 436 members in twelve clubs were learning leadership skills and gaining the self-confidence needed to compete with students who could afford private educations and coaching for college entrance exams. The agency had asked the University of Puerto Rico to admit 50 Aspirantes who had not passed the entrance exam, but were otherwise qualified. The university denied these students admission, so students, board members and ASPIRA staff started a campaign that won widespread public support, news coverage, and finally the admittance of all 50 students.

Reaching Out

ASPIRA of Puerto Rico began to broaden its base and expand its services to a larger community. In 1972-73 the Upward Bound program recruited 120 unemployed Vietnam veterans and prepared them to go to college through counseling, coaching, and tutoring. In the same year, 110 high school students formed the Future University Aspirantes, a peer counseling group dedicated to helping disadvantaged students to prepare for and go to college.



Aspirantes from ASPIRA of Puerto Rico.

Cultural Pride and Awareness

ASPIRA of Puerto Rico developed a host of new programs in the mid-seventies to reach out to in-school and out-of school Puerto Rican youth and address their needs by building self-esteem and cultural pride. The *Cine ASPIRA* film project and theater workshops gave students a deeper appreciation of their culture and heritage using artistic presentations. The new Marine Careers Program offered students a chance to develop skills and self-confidence through an array of marine careers crucial to Puerto Rico's island economy.

Two kinds of clubs emerged from the AS-



Executive Director Hilda Maldonado

PIRA programs: the high school leadership clubs and clubs that met in housing developments or other community centers. In this way, ASPIRA of Puerto Rico could involve the whole community in the process of helping itself to become empowered.

Leadership in Dropout Prevention

ASPIRA of Puerto Rico compiled a report in 1984 entitled "La Política Educativa Para El Mejoramiento Del Desertor Escolar: Programas y Proyecciones," that addressed the dropout rate of 55 percent for students on the island. The report showed the relation between high rates of dropping out and high rates of unemployment, and examined the effectiveness of existing laws and government and non-government programs designed to combat the dropout problem.

The study called for increased participation of the private sector and modification of the system to provide better services to students still in school. In part as a result of this study, ASPIRA began to work more closely with dropouts.

"In the early 1980's, ASPIRA of Puerto Rico really became known for its leadership role in working with and assisting student dropouts," explained Executive Director Hilda Maldonado.

"Before that time, services to dropouts were not delivered so intensely as they are now."

The early eighties also marked an important new outreach component of ASPIRA of Puerto Rico's work: its involvement with preschoolers and their parents through Head Start programs.

"In 1984 we received our first Head Start grant," said Maldonado. "Now the Head Start component is larger than all our other programs."

Still Going Strong

ASPIRA of Puerto Rico finished the decade of the eighties with a strong foundation of programs and ASPIRA clubs, serving over 3,000 students each year. It began expanding its Upward Bound for Veterans program to sites around the island, its Talent Search program



Parents participate in an ASPIRA of Puerto Rico workshop

began working with middle school students, and its Head Start program began to involve parents in literacy efforts. Its Educational Counseling Program worked to increase the number of low-income college students by working with high school students and dropouts, high school gradu-

ates who had not continued their education, and college dropouts. Beyond academic preparation, ASPIRA of Puerto Rico provided its Aspirantes with decision making and lifeskills seminars, personal development retreats, and cultural activities.

"The population we are working with is very diverse in age," Maldonado noted. "From our program working with pregnant mothers to our Head Start children to our high school students to our veterans—our population ranges from 0 to age 60."

In 1988 it began *ASPIRA a la Cima*, a comprehensive program for high school dropouts that included GED tutoring, individual counseling, and job placement. With a new grant from the Centers for Disease Control in 1989, it began to conduct AIDS education projects. Twenty high school students learned about sexuality and sexually-transmitted diseases, and were trained to then bring their education to their own schools and communities as peer counselors. The office also produced two commercials that were shown on television stations throughout Puerto Rico.

As it entered the 1990's, ASPIRA of Puerto Rico emphasized its long-standing commitment to the entire family with a new phase of its Head Start program.

It selected eighty of the most needy families in its caseload to receive comprehensive family intervention services. Besides Head Start for the preschool children, the project links family members to housing and education services, job train-

ing, and counseling for abuse and addiction problems. Individual counselors work directly with families in their homes.

"Long before the government started to realize the importance of working with the whole family, we at ASPIRA knew that parents are a child's main educators, and so we need to show them how they can be their child's best teachers," said Maldonado. "This new addition to our Head Start program helps us to reinforce the family's ability to be self-sufficient."

Maldonado sees few deviations ahead from ASPIRA of Puerto Rico's successful model.

"We plan to continue working with disadvantaged students, enhancing what we are doing now. Besides our emphasis on the family, we are looking at some vocational careers options, and an appreciation of the ecology is permeating all our programs. But in general," she concluded, "we want to continue our physical and psychological stability for the future. Our target area is here (in the Río Piedras neighborhood where their office is located). All our proposals are developed for here."



ASPIRA OF FLORIDA INC.

"One of the issues that we deal with is the constant migration of students from Latin America to Florida. They have to begin a whole new system. They come in, and they have to start all over again," said William Ramos, Deputy Director at the Florida office.

ASPIRA of Florida, the youngest of the ASPIRA associate offices, officially opened its doors as an ASPIRA affiliate in Miami in 1981.

The combined problems of a high drop-out rate, a steady back and forth migration of students and the incentives for youth to join gangs have led to ASPIRA of Florida's unique approach to helping educationally at risk students through Project GAIN (Gang Awareness and Intervention Network), the ASPIRA leadership clubs, the single parents program, the drug-free program, and the adult certification program.

"I believe we are one of the ASPIRA's that offer a wide range of programs. Our curriculum is holistic in the sense that we try to incorporate all the necessary components in the development of both child and parent," Ramos said.

Community-Based Early On

ASPIRA of Florida was born and raised in the community, beginning as a neighborhood project. The affiliate was chartered in 1981. José Méndez²⁸ and Alicia Baro²⁹ defined the first bylaws of ASPIRA of Florida.

Funding came from the City of Miami and an

LEEA Grant for peer counseling programs. The federal LEEA grant was not renewed, however, under the financial crunch of the early eighties. By June 1984, when Executive Director Victoria Hernández³⁰ took charge, there were only three months left in the contract with the city. The entire ASPIRA of Florida staff had resigned in the crisis.

"I had to quickly hire people and get the summer program going," Hernández said. "By the time September came, the City refunded us for 1984-85."

"Victoria elevated ASPIRA from a neighborhood project to a viable Latino organization," said present Executive Director Raúl Martínez. "Everything was built up from the local level."

Expanding Support

Hernández said she then began to seek financial support from other sources, eventually securing funding from the state of Florida, United Way, and the corporate/private sector.

"We tripled our budget, we had close to a half million dollars, and we were able to get a lot of support from the community," Hernández said. ASPIRA of Florida expanded its services to include the innovative drug and crime prevention programs, and started getting funding



Victoria Hernández (third from left) with community supporters.

from the Dade County Public School System.

In 1987, the affiliate became a full-fledged associate of the ASPIRA Association. Hernández left ASPIRA of Florida in 1988 and was succeeded by Raúl Martínez, who had become well-known in the Dade County area as the energetic director of Project GAIN.

"I would not have left ASPIRA if I didn't feel it was on solid ground," Hernández said. "When I left in '88, I left it in really good hands."

Programs to Fit the Community's Needs

"The beauty of ASPIRA of Florida is that we have five role models to look to," Martínez said, referring to the ASPIRA Associates.

According to Martínez, the particular expertise of ASPIRA of Florida lies in providing an early awareness program to Latino youth. Through clubs at the junior high level, ASPIRA of Florida is able to provide positive alternatives to students at an early age.

ASPIRA of Florida received technical assistance from the national office and modeled its programs after those of the other associates, with adjustments to fit the needs of disadvantaged youth in the Dade County area.

It also received powerful support from the Miami-area community. Dr. Joseph Fernández²⁹, while serving as Superintendent of the Dade County Public School System, was also an ASPIRA Board member. He noted in 1988, "We have ASPIRA student chapters at ten of our schools. They serve Hispanic students who are in danger of dropping out of school, and they are doing a fantastic job. The object of our ASPIRA

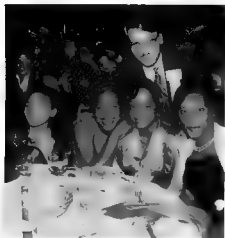


clubs is to give Hispanic students who are at risk of dropping out a sense of belonging while they are still in school. And it's working."

In 1988, Susan Barrera³⁰, an Aspirante who was then a freshman in high school, decided to begin a student-run newsletter with ASPIRA's help. *Ayuda Latin Youth* began publication as a quarterly newsletter for Aspirantes. The newsletter now provides writing, interviewing, editing, and desktop publishing experience to students from several schools, and Aspirantes in other Associate offices now read it also.

Dynamic Growth and Success

Through the late eighties ASPIRA of Florida grew dynamically, quickly catching up with its sister organizations in other states, with plans to expand geographically and programatically. As it grew, its offices mushroomed around Miami. The office also began to reach out to the Central Florida area with its drug education program. In 1991 it was able to consolidate its offices into one comprehensive center in Miami's only majority-Puerto Rican neighborhood. With help from the Dade County Foundation, the office opened a computerized neighborhood homework center for young people.



ASPIRA of Florida Executive Director Raúl Martínez poses with several Aspirantes at the Florida office's annual Awards Ceremony.

National Recognition

In recognition of its dramatic growth and success, ASPIRA of Florida was visited by former Governor Bob Martínez³⁵ and First Lady Barbara Bush in October 1990. Aspirantes and staff had the opportunity to talk with the Governor and Mrs. Bush about ASPIRA's affect in their lives.

"It was a great opportunity to show off the results of a successful program," Executive Director Martínez commented at the time. "That is, the students who will be our community's future leaders."

Ramos concluded, "We are the youngest of the ASPIRA's, but I don't believe we are behind any of them. We grew up really quickly."

ASPIRA of Florida has maintained a 95 percent yearly high school retention rate of program participants over the past two years and in the 1989-90 program year successfully placed 36 of its 38 graduating seniors in postsecondary institutions. Its staff and students have received numerous commendations from area governments, and have also been appointed to state and city task forces, particularly in the area of drug and crime prevention.



Aspirantes from ASPIRA of Florida.

The Nineties and Beyond: the Future of ASPIRA

Expansion

A major issue for the ASPIRA Association as the organization strides into the nineties is the need to expand its services to address the educational needs of a growing Latino youth population.

"The greatest challenge is to help bring an organization which has been doing very good work for many years to a position where it can do so on a grander scale," said Dr. Janice Petrovich, who became National Executive Director in 1988. "The issues we have been working on for thirty years—education and leadership development in the Latino community—are finally on the nation's domestic agenda. Now is the time for ASPIRA to move forward."

The issue of expansion has been at the top of ASPIRA's agenda since its structural and ideological reunification as an association. Many regions where Latinos are a high percentage of the population have expressed interest in starting affiliates in their area.

"I feel ASPIRA is going to expand into other states," said Luz Pinedo*, an Aspirante and former Secretary of the National Board of Directors. "In three years or so I see ASPIRA as a word everybody will know...I see ASPIRA becoming something even better and that's why I want to stay with it. I want to see it grow, just like they've seen me grow."

ASPIRA of Connecticut, Inc.

In February of 1991 the ASPIRA National Board of Directors formally

accepted a proposal from community leaders in Connecticut to open ASPIRA of Connecticut. This culminated nearly a year's work by the approximately 20 leaders from Hartford and Bridgeport.



Members of the ASPIRA of Connecticut organizing committee: María Torres, Wilfredo Matos, Sara Meléndez, Omar Torres, and Alma Mays.

"We are all delighted to work with such a dedicated group of people," said National Board Chair Luis A. Martínez-Pérez. "This is the first ASPIRA state chapter to open in ten years, and it marks the beginning of an era of growth for us."

Expansion Defined

In 1989, the National Board spent four days on a leadership retreat discussing the issue of expansion. The Board decided expansion should be a top priority of the Association. Most associates feel ready to begin the process by expanding



The community's future: 1991 National Interns of the ASPIRA Public Policy Leadership Program pose during their graduation ceremony on Capitol Hill.

in their own states.

"We're very interested in growing and expanding. There is a great need for our services," said Executive Director of ASPIRA of Illinois Aida Sánchez. They have begun ASPIRA Clubs in several schools in the Chicago suburbs.

"New York is headed to expand throughout the state," said Executive Director of ASPIRA of New York Julia Rivera.

Associates say they want to expand their focus as well as their offices, targeting other at-risk groups.

"We are targeting the Homestead area where there are a lot of migrant workers," said William Ramos of ASPIRA of Florida. In the fall of 1991 ASPIRA of Florida will begin working in

Building Partnerships

But the key to ASPIRA's expansion into new cities and states will be the building of stronger partnerships with businesses, education officials, and other leaders who are concerned about the undereducation of Latino youth.

"We are pleased to see that the concerns we have been working with for so long are now national concerns," wrote Petrovich in the 1988 annual report. "The specter of an undereducated work force in a highly technological world is moving government officials, corporate executives, educators, and community leaders to join together to combat the crises of dropouts, illiteracy, and decaying urban communities."

ASPIRA: Stepping Confidently into the Future

These partnerships, combined with ASPIRA's thirty years of community education experience and the energy of our young people, will break down the barriers confronting our youth, the leaders of tomorrow.

"The growing Latino population represents an underdeveloped national resource that will become increasingly important to our nation's economic, political and military strength as the majority of the population ages and the global economy becomes more of a reality," said ASPIRA of Florida Executive Director Raúl Martínez.

As the ASPIRA movement steps forward into the nineties, it takes with it thirty years of experience, thirty years of development, thirty years of growth.

"When you look at ASPIRA's history and see Puerto Ricans in key positions in government and in the corporate world, ASPIRA is the organization that has facilitated their development. The 30th anniversary is a coming of age," said ASPIRA of New York's Julia Rivera. "ASPIRA is no longer a teenager. ASPIRA is coming into adulthood."



Luis Martínez-Pérez, Chair of the National Board of Directors, and Janice Petrovich, National Executive Director

schools in Broward County, just north of Miami.

Getting students involved earlier through junior high and elementary school clubs is also a growing trend.

Another kind of expansion associates agree is crucial to the continued growth of the organization is technological expansion.

"We need to expand internally by automating. It will facilitate everything," said Nilda M. Cintrón, Director of Finances for ASPIRA of Pennsylvania.

Julia Rivera agrees. "With fax machines and computers we can respond to mass communication needs."

Endnotes

1. Now the National Puerto Rican Forum.
2. Dr. Pantoja is the founder and director of Producir, a community development agency in Canóvanas, Puerto Rico.
3. Mr. LaFontaine was most recently Superintendent of the Hartford Public School District.
4. Mr. Negrón is a consultant in Long Island.
5. Dr. Trilla is unaccounted for.
6. Dr. Ortiz practices medicine in Indiana.
7. Mr. Núñez directs the National Puerto Rican Coalition.
8. Mr. Moscoso is former U.S. Ambassador to Venezuela and former director of the Puerto Rico Economic Development Administration.
9. Mr. Alvarez is President of the National Urban Fellows, Inc.
10. Mr. González is Staff Director of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights.
11. Mr. Vallecillo is Special Programs Manager for IBM Corporation.
12. Dr. Santiago is President of Hostos Community College.
13. Dr. Reyes is a member of the New York City Board of Education.
14. Mr. Anglada is Dean of the Bayamón Community College in Puerto Rico.
15. Dr. Rosario is President of Rosario, Stanton Associates.
16. Mr. Nieves is a social worker for Corner House in New Jersey.
17. Mr. Calitri is unaccounted for.
18. Ms. Bello is Executive Director of the Association of Hispanic Arts, Inc.
19. Ms. Ramírez is a school council member and civic leader in Chicago.
20. Ms. Herrera is a Commissioner for the Chicago Park District.
21. Mr. Rodríguez works in the Department of Government Contracts of the Chicago Board

of Education.

22. Dr. Kyle is Assistant to the President of Triton College.

23. Ms. Ubarry is a consultant in economic development.

24. Ms. Vizcarrondo is Director of the Office of Hispanic Affairs, New Jersey Department of Community Affairs.

25. Dr. Núñez Wormack is Associate Dean of Faculty at the College of Staten Island.

26. Mr. Martínez is deceased.

27. Mr. Velázquez is deceased.

28. Dr. Gutiérrez is a Senior Consultant at the Academy for Educational Development.

29. Mr. Montalvo is a practicing psychologist in New Mexico.

30. Mr. Méndez is deceased.

31. Ms. Baro is Vice-President of Kendar Realty.

32. Ms. Hernández is Assistant to the President of Florida International University.

33. Dr. Fernández is Chancellor of the New York City Board of Education

34. Ms. Barrera has recently graduated from Miami Edison High School. She spent the summer of 1991 working at the *Hispanic Link News Service* in Washington, DC, through the ASPIRA Public Policy Leadership Program.

35. Mr. Martínez is Director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy.

36. Ms. Pinedo is a college student at Miami-Dade Community College.



ASPIRA Timeline

- 1917 Congress declares Puerto Ricans United States citizens
- 1923 Puerto Ricans living in Manhattan establish the Puerto Rican Brotherhood of America
- 1926 Thugs hired by ethnic merchants go on a rampage against Puerto Ricans in East Harlem
- 1928 Puerto Rico hit by hurricane San Felipe. 300 deaths and the destruction of 50 million dollars worth of property including all but ten percent of the island's coffee plants.
- 1929 Beginning of Great Depression
- 1940 Puerto Rican population in the United States reaches 69,967

- 1944 Antonia Pantoja arrives in the United States
- 1948 Operation Bootstrap—economic aid to Puerto Rico
- 1950 Puerto Rican migration increases due to better transportation and postwar economic expansion in the United States. Puerto Rican population reaches 301,375
- 1956 Hispanic Young Adults Association is formed by Puerto Rican college students and young professionals. Later becomes Puerto Rican Association for Community Affairs.
- 1957 Puerto Rican-Hispanic Leadership Forum forms
- 1959 Puerto Rican Student Leadership Conferences
- 1961 **ASPIRA is established by the Puerto Rican-Hispanic Leadership Forum as a nonprofit bilingual counseling agency to assist Puerto Rican youth through career counseling**
- 1963 52 ASPIRA Clubs throughout New York City
- 1964 Civil Rights Act is signed
- 1965 Voting Rights Act and Economic Opportunity Act signed
- 1965 ASPIRA becomes incorporated, is declared tax exempt, and establishes its own Board of Directors
- 1968 Bilingual Education Act becomes law. ASPIRA of America is created with a \$750,000 grant from The Ford Foundation
- 1969 Affiliate offices are established in Newark, Philadelphia, Chicago, and San Juan
- 1969 Young Lords establish chapter in New York City, begin health programs, spur Puerto Rican student movements
- 1970 Health Careers Program launched by ASPIRA of New York
- 1971 Health Careers Program becomes a national program. ASPIRA Clubs Federation students in New York raise \$2000 for flood victims in Puerto Rico, collect food and clothing for 1500 refugees

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- 1972 Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund created by a group of Puerto Rican lawyers to legally challenge discrimination against Puerto Ricans. PRLDEF files a class action suit against the Board of Education of the City of New York on behalf of 15 school children, ASPIRA, and other organizations
- 1974 The Board of Education of NYC signs the ASPIRA Consent Decree, agreeing to provide bilingual education for all limited-English proficient students in the city schools
- 1975, 1977 PRLDEF files contempt proceedings against the city government for its failure to comply with the Consent Decree
- 1976 ASPIRA of America study, *Social Factors in Educational Attainment Among Puerto Ricans in U.S. Metropolitan Areas, 1970*
- 1977 Formation of the National Puerto Rican Coalition
- 1980 ASPIRA of America creates the Center for Educational Equity in Washington, DC as its division for research and advocacy
- 1981 ASPIRA of Florida joins the ASPIRA family
- 1981 Institute for Puerto Rican Policy formed. National Congress for Puerto Rican Rights formed. New York City administration funds Puerto Rican Organization for Growth, Research, Education, and Self-Sufficiency (PROGRESS)
- 1981 ASPIRA of Pennsylvania begins three-year study on dropping out and delinquency among Puerto Rican youths
- 1982 PRLDEF successfully challenges realignment of electoral districts in New York City
- 1983 ASPIRA of New York study, *Racial and Ethnic High School Dropout Rates in New York City*
- 1984 ASPIRA of Illinois *Chicago Dropout Study* released. ASPIRA Coca-Cola Support Services Project (Project A.C.C.E.S.S.) of ASPIRA of Illinois initiated. ASPIRA of Puerto Rico produces a report examining the dropout rate, entitled, *La política educativa para el mejoramiento del deserción escolar: programas y proyecciones*
- 1985 The ASPIRA National Office moves to Washington, DC. The Association name is changed from ASPIRA of America to the ASPIRA Association. ASPIRA established the Institute for Policy Research in Washington and begins research for the **Five Cities High School Dropout Study**.
- 1986 The first group of Aspirantes come to Washington as participants in the national component of the ASPIRA Public Policy Leadership Program
- 1987 *Northeast Hispanic Needs: A Guide for Action* is published by the Institute for Policy Research
- 1988 The Hispanic Community Mobilization for Dropout Prevention is begun as a national parent-involvement program
- 1989 The Institute for Policy Research produces *Making the Most of Your Child's Education: A Guide for Parents* in both English- and Spanish-language versions. Both it and its successor, *More Topics for Parents*, are critical and commercial successes. The National Board of Directors goes on a Leadership Retreat and discusses expansion
- 1990 The Executive Order on Excellence in Education for Hispanic Americans is issued by the President. First Lady Barbara Bush visits ASPIRA of Florida.
- 1991 ASPIRA of Connecticut is officially recognized as an ASPIRA Affiliate. ASPIRA continues its mission of empowering Latino communities through the education and leadership development of their youth
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